

# IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

## A place where you don't want love

Aside from feeling patriotic and displaying the flag for the fourth of July, I spend much of that holiday week watching the Wimbledon tennis tournament from England. For those who think it's a rich person's game, think again. It's cheaper and takes less time than golf or bowling and uses up a lot more calories, believe me.

I started getting serious about tennis when I was in my twenties. By the time I was age 38, I won the City of Galesburg women's singles title. Fortunately, lots of women weren't playing tennis yet in 1974 and the field was small but mighty. I played two matches and about died in the process. My first match was with Harriett Lew, rest her soul, who was a powerful player, volleying with men most of the time on her own private tennis court.

I managed to beat her by "Bobby Riggsing" her, scrambling to return every shot, using strategy instead of the power I didn't always have. We played three sets and I won. My game wasn't pretty, but it did the job.

Then I immediately had to play another match and with another player who was basically stronger. I was not only the oldest contestant, but smoked and was the mother of three kidlets — so I got by on nerves and a competitive spirit. We played three sets again, and if it weren't for Art Fish playing ball boy, I never would have survived. The match ended with an ungracious double fault by my opponent. There are few times in my life I have been more relieved.

I was particularly lucky that Marcia Johnson had not yet reached her full potential. We used to play when she was just learning and I was probably at my peak. I used to say that when she gets her game together, I'll be sunk. Well, she did and I was. She was city champion for a number of years after that. She and I entered the doubles tournament one year and beat a couple of high schoolers. Good grief, I was even older by that time and it was fun. Unfortunately, our next match was with Nancy Stephenson, who was ranked about 3rd in the State, and her partner, and that match cooked our goose. I mean, we were trashed.

Billie Jean King was my idol. She and Pam Shriver played at Galesburg High School years ago and it was an awful location but a thrill to see them.

So I was in front of the television last



Saturday morning to see Venus Williams, who learned to play tennis on public courts with the grass growing through the cracks, outplay Lindsay Davenport. Davenport never got going and Williams is a determined and extraordinary athlete. After hours of showing no emotion and total concentration, Williams won the championship and jumped up and down like a third grader, grinning ear to ear. She and her sister, Serena, and Martina Hingis began their tennis careers together, and frankly, they were all unpleasant and spoiled kids for awhile. But they've grown up. Williams was funny and gracious in her comments to the spectators after the match.

On Sunday, the men's championship between Pete Sampras and Patrick Rafter of Australia was delayed several times by rain, but when it began in earnest, it was a doozy. Sampras had a lot at stake this time, wanting to win his 7th Wimbledon and set a record for winning the most grand slam tournaments — ever. An exciting match, with serves reaching 130 miles an hour. Sampras won and was very emotional, apparently because he had spent a week with a sore leg and hadn't warmed up or moved except in his matches — but also because his parents were on hand for the first time since 1992, when he lost the U.S. Open. I'm not sure why they have not attended his matches, but he was thrilled they were there.

I'm such a sop that I get emotional too. I'm just right in there — clapping, telling the players what a dumb move they just made, doing a little arm pumping, (which apparently is acceptable when Pete Sampras does it after a good shot, but not when golfer Tiger Woods does it. Gee, I wonder why.)

Well, anyhow — it was an exciting week and the next stop is the U.S. Open tennis tournament in New York. See you there.

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